

January 8, 2011 Listening Session

My name is Amy Mills of Mills Wilderness Adventures of MT. Thank you for allowing me to share my ideas with all of you. I appreciate your service.

My husband and father in law have been in the wilderness outfitting business since 1977. I have been active in the business since 1994.

The recent passing of I161 has brought uncertainty to our family business.

Our family business is diverse in the sense that we offer summer pack trips in the wilderness as well as the fishing and hunting. We need the hunting aspect of our business in order to keep it viable. University studies show this type of tourism is very robust and offers value added recreation. The relatively low number of visitors generates high revenue and takes nothing away.

With the new licensing process we are facing, it no longer matters how much experience you have, how professional you are, how sound and dependable your horse and mule herd is, how experienced your guides are, the condition of equipment and tack or what kind of reputation you have. To get a deposit and bookings from a client with a license is now based on luck, plain and simple. I am amazed by the comments made by people who say "the good outfitters" will be fine. NOT SO! Our business will be thrown to chance every year.

We live and operate out of Augusta, MT. The latest census figure available for our community is 284 people. Our small family business employed 20 people in 2010 with wages totaling \$89,000.00. That is just over 7% of our community population. Also I would like to point out that our business is only one of seven outfitting businesses residing in and operating out of Augusta. Three of us each employed 18-20 people in 2010. This would work out to around 21% of our population. Please consider the impact of these figures to our tiny little town. If 20 % of Missoula's population could be out of a job our state would be frantic. Augusta is only one out of many small towns across the state where tourism is the heartbeat. Our local grocery store expense "business only" was \$9,000.00 that does not count our "off season" groceries. The same for local gasoline purchases "business only" totaled \$9,580.00. Again, this is only part of the money we spend locally, and we are only one of seven businesses in the same industry.

Our business operates in the wilderness which includes a very small amount of private land hunting. Although the supporters of I161 said, over and over, that the initiative was not directed at public lands outfitters like ourselves, it is public lands outfitters like us that are going to be most affected by it. For example, a wilderness outfitter cannot simply try to overbook our clients to compensate a 20 to 50% loss in the draw process. Reason being if all or most of our clients do draw we would be in violation of Forest Service regulations regarding the number of people in our camp. On our private ground lease we can actually over book and still take the clients because we are not under any prior set regulations of numbers. One change that could mitigate some of the damage done by 161 would be to offer a "wilderness only" big game combo license. It makes sense for many reasons. Remember, proponents of 161 claimed that, they did not have an issue with public land outfitters. Public ground means public access. Also please consider the wilderness is Federal land to be enjoyed by all. The man or woman who lives across the country in another state has as much claim to the wilderness as any Montanan. I feel the license should be a new category available to Non-Residents and priced the same as the draw license or greater. The general big game non-resident license is \$897.00 this year. The higher price makes sense since people getting this license must have a true interest and a plan of how to get into the wilderness. I believe that will keep any abuse or unintended consequences of this license from happening. This would also increase FWP revenue.

You need not worry about increased growth of wilderness outfitting due to a wilderness license category, because wilderness outfitters have use days and simply cannot use more days than they are permitted. Camps are repeatedly regulated and physically checked. The maximum number of people allowed in any one camp is 15, plus the outfitter has to be within his permit use day numbers.

If you have any questions about how the Forest Service manages outfitters or anything about our business module please contact me. The outfitting industry is very complex and complicated.

Thank you for your time today.

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